



Opening Statement
Chairman John D. Rockefeller IV
April 17, 2012

***Promoting American Competitiveness: Filling Jobs
Today and Training Workers for Tomorrow***

I want to thank Senator Klobuchar for holding this important hearing today. The need for investment in the skills of the American worker is as great as ever.

Unfortunately, U.S. investment in workforce development lags far behind our global competitors. The U.S. spends only .04 percent of its gross domestic product on job training, ranking 21st out of 25 OECD countries.

Even today, as our unemployment rate sits above 8 percent, we still have hundreds of thousands of skilled, and well-paying jobs that go unfilled. We should never have these two problems at the same time.

In the face of these challenges, America's workers must receive the training necessary to gain the skills that industry demands. With the right training programs in place, we will be able to fill the

jobs that we have and prepare for the jobs that will keep us competitive for years to come.

That's why I'm holding a discussion in my home state of West Virginia this Friday on this very issue – how to meet the demands of an evolving workforce. It will take seamless collaboration among all levels of education – K-12 through college – and deliberate coordination with in-demand industries.

I hear from employers – good employers – in West Virginia all the time who have job openings. They have opportunities. But they can't find workers with the precise skill sets they need. In today's recuperating economy, we simply can't afford to not address this gap.

In the 1920s, the U.S. promised every American a high school education. In the 1950s and 60s, the GI bill provided millions of returning soldiers access to vocational training or college education. Today, we can harness the vast infrastructure that we already have in place to make sure that educational pathways meet the full range of skills needed by businesses.

One area of the economy that I'm particularly concerned about is the manufacturing sector and the manufacturing workforce.

When manufacturing is booming, it spreads economic benefits far beyond manufacturing itself. For instance, every manufacturing job is said to support as many as four other jobs. Where there are factories, there are suppliers. Where there are suppliers, there's a supply chain of producers –and more workers. And where there

are workers, there are restaurants, cultural establishments, and stores to sustain and entertain them.

Yet, despite this attention and the importance of this industry to our economy, manufacturers face significant employment challenges.

Study after study reveals that manufacturing employers are unable to find individuals with the skills to perform their jobs. As a result, it is said that over 600,000 jobs remain open today in manufacturing.

While I understand that this “gap” in employment is due in part to a large retiring workforce, I also know that we have not done a good enough job to train workers and engage students in manufacturing careers.

Manufacturers tell us that they struggle to attract new talent because of negative perceptions of their industry as “dirty, dark and dangerous.”

We need to overcome this perception. Let’s pull back the curtain and show manufacturing for what it really is – the engine of innovation and high-tech research and development in this country.

And, as manufacturers innovate and develop more complex processes, they will need more educated and skilled workers.

Today, I want to hear from our witnesses about what can be done to fill good-paying jobs in our manufacturing sector.

Our citizens are the best in the world at innovation, and our workers are some of the best-educated and hardest-working in

the world, but if they do not receive the training that employers need, our jobs crisis will only continue to grow.